

# Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of

Middlesex University research

<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk>

Allen, Felicity (2013) Reassembling the barricades: further thoughts on 'What does globalisation mean for education in the art museum?'. Engage : the international journal of visual art and gallery education, 32 . ISSN 1365-9383 [Article]

Final accepted version (with author's formatting)

This version is available at: <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/22237/>

## Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant (place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

[eprints@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@mdx.ac.uk)

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/policies.html#copy>

Reassembling the Barricades: further thoughts on *What does globalisation mean for education in the art museum?*

Felicity Allen



Portfolio Advice Day in the Turner galleries at Tate Britain, 2008, with Chelsea School of Art, UAL access programme offering advice on applying to art school particularly for young people without family experience of higher education. Curator: Rebecca Sinker.

'Commitment to greater human equality is a central feature of [the Left's radical tradition in education] – and one of its basic constituents is common education: all members of a society educated together. Common education's first objective is a broad and balanced learning experience that develops all human beings to their full capacities, its second to act cohesively on those who live together to create one society. [...]

Common education's next great historic advance must involve tackling the selective processes that divide and oppress in the occupational structure. This will force us to look at the kind of society that education and work are both supposed to serve – in short, rediscovering education's social and political purposes ... Far from being over, as elitists prematurely conclude, it is more than possible that common education's greatest contribution is yet to come. [...]<sup>1</sup>

When I first read Benn's essay nearly twenty years after its 1992 publication, I felt as if I had been taken back into an earlier belief system that I recognised from my childhood, one that is habitually described these days as 'utopian.' One of the most radical concepts in the excerpt quoted above is that education and work are both supposed to serve society, a collective made up of individual citizens who can be described as equal, and potentially sharing common interests. This contrasts starkly with current articulations - that education is individualized, competitive, and something to be bought, that it is there to fulfill the needs of industry. The regulatory assessment of pupils, teachers and of schools themselves, done in the name of public accountability, further positions the student-citizen as a consumer. In this formulation, knowledge is reduced to a consumer good and purchasing power determines academic status.

I have suggested elsewhere that the British phenomenon known as gallery education developed out of various radical practices; one motive was the possibility for education to take place outside of and across conventional stratifying categories of age, culture, gender, qualification etc, and this de-stratification had, itself, a radical purpose.<sup>2</sup> David Anderson's important publication about museum education, *A Common Wealth*, argues that museums are largely in public ownership, and therefore a material form of cultural capital of the people. Global British museums, such as Tate, now gain less than half their funding from the state (*qua* the democratic representation of the people, in common, i.e.,

---

<sup>1</sup> Benn, C., extracts from 'Common Education and the Radical Tradition', reproduced in Allen, F. (2011), *Education*, Boston/London: MIT/Whitechapel, Documents of Contemporary Art, pp. 78–82.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Allen, F. (2008), 'Situating Gallery Education', in *Tate Encounters* Issue 2, at [http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters/edition-2/tateencounters2\\_felicity\\_allen.pdf](http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters/edition-2/tateencounters2_felicity_allen.pdf) or Allen, F., with S. Clive (1995), 'From Community Arts to Gallery Education' in M. Dickson (ed.), *Art with People*. Newcastle: AN Publications.

'the public'). There is nevertheless an understandable resistance by many working in the art and museum sectors to acknowledge their release from a concept of the public, despite the fact that concepts such as: popular representation within a nation state, or: redistribution through taxation, seem to hold more substance as memories than as political reality.<sup>3</sup>

I now write in the assumption that, despite the various forms of corporatisation and managerialist regulation to which museums and galleries are currently subject, gallery education can still potentially act radically, depending, as Ken Loach has said, on the political will.<sup>4</sup> The demands made on institutions by corporatisation and techno-bureaucracy habitually run counter to the positioning of the citizen as an educated agent.

It is crucial now that we analyse the wider social constructions, the concept of 'the common', and the agency of the individual citizen as student and teacher, in the face of the hyper-fragmentation currently visited by central government on all areas of the formal and informal education system. This hyper-fragmentation is the real 'trickle down' effect, as it both produces and possibly masks the increasing stratification of British social relations, in terms of access to employment, wealth, class, education, healthcare, welfare rights, housing, or travel and migration. The stratification built into schools, from the provision (or not) of play space and open-ended learning, through to the potential (or not) for in-depth discourse and research, merely prepares students for the wider social stratifications.

This article is an effort to re-think the 'utopian' commitment to the common, and to active anti-elitism that has underwritten gallery education from its radical beginnings. In particular I am concerned with regulatory stratification of the social, educational and cultural, as exemplified through border controls, cultural capital, migration and global mobilities. To explore this, I will draw on two projects

---

<sup>3</sup> Dewdney et al (op. cit.) refers to concepts such as 'audience', 'public', 'citizen', 'consumer', etc, p.8. Regarding the "'30/30/30" funding model (public subsidy, private sector income, and self-generated income)', see p.31.

Anderson, D. (1999), *A Common Wealth: Museums in the Learning Age, a Report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport*. London: Stationery Office.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Loach interviewed with Tristram Hunt by Kirsty Wark, *Newsnight*, BBC. London. 11 March 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21755696> accessed 12 March 2013.

undertaken as part of a cross cultural strategy during a period when I led Tate Britain's Interpretation and Education (I&E) department, as well as one project in production at South London Gallery. As the public museum in the the global city becomes corporatised, I am concerned that the attention to the 'local' which has become habitually accepted as the work of the education department, is unintentionally confused with the philanthropic model of corporate social responsibility, switching the radical ethos of gallery education into a reactionary confinement. I am wary of the popular political concern regarding questions of citizenship; it is the wholesale corporatisation of 'democracy' that is at issue, and arguments about 'citizenship' focus on the individual as a decoy; that is, part of the process of neutralising the collective and the common.

### **The common and the elite**

Caroline Benn's essay was first published in 1992 and it was around this time that the concept 'globalisation' started to become common currency. Globalisation appeared to disrupt the Western Enlightenment ideal of the democratic nation state, of which education – and, for the left, common education – was an intrinsic part, whether in the form of the school, the university or the public art gallery and museum. This was also during the period when Caroline Benn and her husband Tony Benn were challenging the co-option of the Labour Party into New Labour. The Cold War's end had been marked by the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and state socialism had been exposed as frequently totalitarian. Thatcherite neo-liberalism, little more than a decade old, was already becoming mainstream.

Benn also considers the Labour Party's repeated failure, when in government, to address the divisive impact of private education. Instead of an egalitarian strategy which would have included taking private schools into public ownership, Labour satisfied itself with token gestures towards social mobility and ideas of meritocracy. I would add that this was supported by the welfare state as a cushion against negative social mobility, something which is currently being dismantled. Within the terms of the nation state, Benn takes account of globalisation by recognizing the existence of multiple cultures in

Britain. Her implied view of citizenship is egalitarian – the citizen is a contributor to the common good, and benefits from an emancipatory education which develops individual agency.

The West has greeted globalisation by consolidating its borders and, as a result of Thatcher's decision to remain outside the EU Shengen agreement, Britain's borders are already penetrable by only the wealthy from outside the EU; government policy is currently shifting against those from within the EU. Only a global elite passes through borders without contest. The rest of us (even if we have what we think of as savings) are subject to various detentions and restrictions, an Orwellian scenario in which technology appears to arbitrate and people become machines ('Computer says no.').

Artists as employees of art institutions are being expected to police these borders and some are resisting: see, for instance the website *Citizen Artist* and its call for participants from the academic sector for its project 'Borders and Boundaries'.<sup>5</sup> And as Marcus Verhagen writes, 'At a time when power requires and confers mobility, borders both reflect and maintain a new international distribution of privilege. As the philosopher Étienne Balibar has it, the border is instrumental in establishing the equality of persons as national subjects while enforcing forms of segregation that reflect an "international class differentiation".'<sup>6</sup> In this situation Bourdieu's analysis of cultural capital takes on new significance. To perform - or to have agency - in this world one needs, as well as a measure of wealth, the complex sets of knowledge, identities and networks to enable fluid international travel. For the global art world one also needs, not only easy familiarity with multiple and specific national cultures, but also knowledge of work produced within the terms of global art. One needs to be able to distinguish between what is becoming understood as 'global art' and its other, described as 'regional

---

<sup>5</sup> For instance, '... send us reflections on ... 1) your understanding of your new 'job' as a Border Agent ...' Available at: <http://citizenartist.org.uk/citizen-artist.html> (Downloaded on: 26 March 2013).

'Computer says no' is a reference to a regular comedy sketch in the BBC television series *Little Britain* 2003-05.

<sup>6</sup> Verhagen, M. (2013), 'Border Control', *Art Monthly*, no. 364, March 2013, pp. 11–14.

art.' It is global museums, represented by border-crossing curators, critics, artists and collectors, who are key arbiters in determining what is global and what is regional.<sup>7</sup>

What chance is there for cross cultural agency, or even simply mobility, whether social, intellectual or geographical? An important part of the work undertaken by the I&E department at Tate Britain explored how far we could go with these questions. This work has been pursued further in other galleries and museums, including by former colleagues who now work elsewhere.

### Cross cultural strategies

We learnt a lot from three projects. *Visual Dialogues* and *Conversations* were planned collaboratively shortly after my arrival in 2003. *Nabnon-Together* I planned with Paul Doubleday from the British Council; I have written about this project elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Each of these projects, as well as other programmes and interpretative strategies contributed to the development of a cross cultural strategy which included the creation of the post of Curator: Cross Cultural Programmes (all the posts in the Interpretation and Education team were titled curator) and the development of the AHRC-funded research project *Tate Encounters*.

Our strategy involved eliminating projects having a philanthropic ethos in favour of those set up for mutual learning and exchange. I would argue that, as museums become increasingly corporatised, there is a danger that the education department returns to a philanthropic model comparable to the commercial model of corporate social responsibility. This, again, lends itself to the stratification of communities, where those near to a museum are identified as specifically 'local,' reinforcing cultural and social immobilisation: keeping people in their place.

In her germinal article, Carmen Mörsch analyses gallery education as having four functions: affirmative for an existing audience, reproductive for young audiences, critical deconstructive when it

---

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Rugoff, R. (1999), 'Rules of the Game', *Frieze*, no. 44, Jan/Feb 99 and my response, Allen, F. (1999), 'It's Groovy to be Global', *Art Monthly*, no. 224, March 1999.

<sup>8</sup> See my articles 'What does globalisation mean for education in the art museum?' (op. cit.), and 'Border Crossing' (2009), *Tate Papers* no. 11, April 2009, revised for I-JADE (International Journal of Art and Design Education), no. 28.3, 2009.

works with participants to question and become autonomous agents of knowledge, and transformative.<sup>9</sup> The transformative effect of gallery education involves changing society and institutions; it is a wide remit. While any single gallery education project may contain elements of any or each of these four functions, in order to build on its radical roots, gallery education must involve the transformative function, if only because the corporatisation of global museums means that all museums are in a perpetual state of transformation and those working with education should ensure their own agency and influence in that transformation.

Artists and educators often employ the concept of 'giving voice' through the museum and this is problematic. bell hooks has exposed the power play involved in appropriating and, as it were, speaking for and over, the vulnerability of the oppressed Other. According to Gayatri Spivak Chakraborty it is a challenge to even recognise that the oppressed Other has spoken, let alone to interpret her speech.<sup>10</sup> I have discussed elsewhere the complexity of Tate's multiple voices, and the somewhat contradictory PR pressures for an institution to speak with clarity and lack of contradiction.<sup>11</sup> Both *Conversations* and *Visual Dialogues* revealed some of the problems implicit in issues of voice in the global museum. The projects evolved in different ways, inflected by the individuals who developed and produced them at a professional level, as well as by those who contributed as participants. Each iteration of the projects had a different impact on the institution.

---

<sup>9</sup> Mörsch, C. (2011), 'Alliances for Unlearning: On the Possibility of Future Collaborations Between Gallery Education and Institutions of Critique', *Afterall*, no. 26, Spring 2011, Central St Martins, UAL, London with Museum van Hedendaagse, Antwerp and Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, Seville.

<sup>10</sup> 'No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk.' bell hooks (1990), 'Marginality as a site of resistance', in R. Ferguson et al. (eds), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990: pp. 241-43. Also, see Chakraborty, G.S. ([1988] revised 2010), 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Morris, R.C., (ed.) *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>11</sup> In 'What does globalisation mean for education in the art museum?' (op. cit.).





Gayle Chong Kwan: Still from *Conversations* (2007)

## Conversations

The titles *Visual Dialogues* and *Conversations* both suggest ideas of the value of reciprocity and negotiation rather than representation. But even if negotiation is used as a strategy in art and education practice, its manifestation in the museum is crucial: how is something known, seen or heard, and how do we know it has been? How do we produce this knowledge as art made by individual and collective agency, rather than through the social science methodologies appropriated by consumer-citizen politics?<sup>12</sup>

In preparation for the exhibition *Hogarth* (2007), we planned to make a collective work as an updated take on Hogarth's work. Matilda (Matty) Pye, who ran Tate Britain's pre-school / family Sure Start programme, worked initially with Marijke Steedman, who ran the youth programme, and started to develop a project with artist Gayle Chong Kwan and fourteen participants. Ultimately, five women

---

<sup>12</sup> 'One of the consequences of what is being termed here as the art museum's misrecognition of audience, in its commonsense use of sociological demographics, is that a redundant model of the social is also being perpetuated.' Dewdney et al (2012) op.cit., p.5.

worked with Matty and Gayle to produce the film *Conversations* which was displayed during the course of the *Hogarth* exhibition. Aside from Matty, as curator, and Gayle as artist, all but one of the contributors were young mothers who, because of their particular circumstances, were clients of the charity Coram (the current manifestation of what was originally The Foundling Hospital); the one remaining, Lydia Carmichael, had grown up as a resident of the militaristic Foundling Hospital and was now a volunteer guide for The Foundling Museum. When Sir Thomas Coram founded the Hospital in the eighteenth century he had invited his friend William Hogarth to become one of its governors. On accepting, Hogarth was able to access a significant London space in which he could exhibit his work to the rich philanthropists and potential collectors who patronised the upper rooms of what is now the Museum. This space was of course off-limits to the foundlings, a forerunner perhaps of the social spaces reserved today for the patrons of global museums.

In addition to the artist and the producer, I am referring to all those involved in making *Conversations* as 'contributors', to represent the dynamic negotiation between artist, curator and contributor. Citing Dave Beech, *Post-critical Museology* addresses 'the potential folly of participation to construct unequal relations of power between participant and the conditions of participation, thereby undercutting its social value as a form of democratic inclusion in meaning-making and reinscribing the very conditions of unequal power relation it sought to address.' Beech uses the term 'collaboration' rather than 'participation'; 'collaboration', it is argued, suggests an explicit sharing of authorial rights and decisions. The authors note that the distinction between participation and collaboration was well understood by Tate I&E curators; anecdote suggests that disparities between collaboration and participation represent key distinctions of approach between education curatorial positions and exhibition curatorial



Gayle Chong Kwan: Still from *Conversations* (2007)

positions. Research into these distinctions, and their relation to exhibitionary practices, is overdue.<sup>13</sup>

Responding to the complexities of the contributors' lives, Matty and Gayle changed the form of the project from a series of workshops to one in which Gayle met individually with the contributors in their homes, or at Coram or the Foundling Hospital, to produce a documentary film as a work of art. In this sense the contributors shifted the practice of the department, if not the museum. Because of the ad hoc conditions that were intrinsic to the project, the sound quality of the film was extremely variable: initially I suggested partial sub-titling. I was thinking in terms of interpretation and clarity, of the prospective visitors to *Hogarth* and the demographic projections of my colleagues in Marketing. However, in discussion with Matty, I realised that if I considered the negotiated complexities that the

---

<sup>13</sup> Dewdney et al (2012) op.cit., p.64, citing Beech, D. (2008), 'Include Me Out!', *Art Monthly*, no. 315.

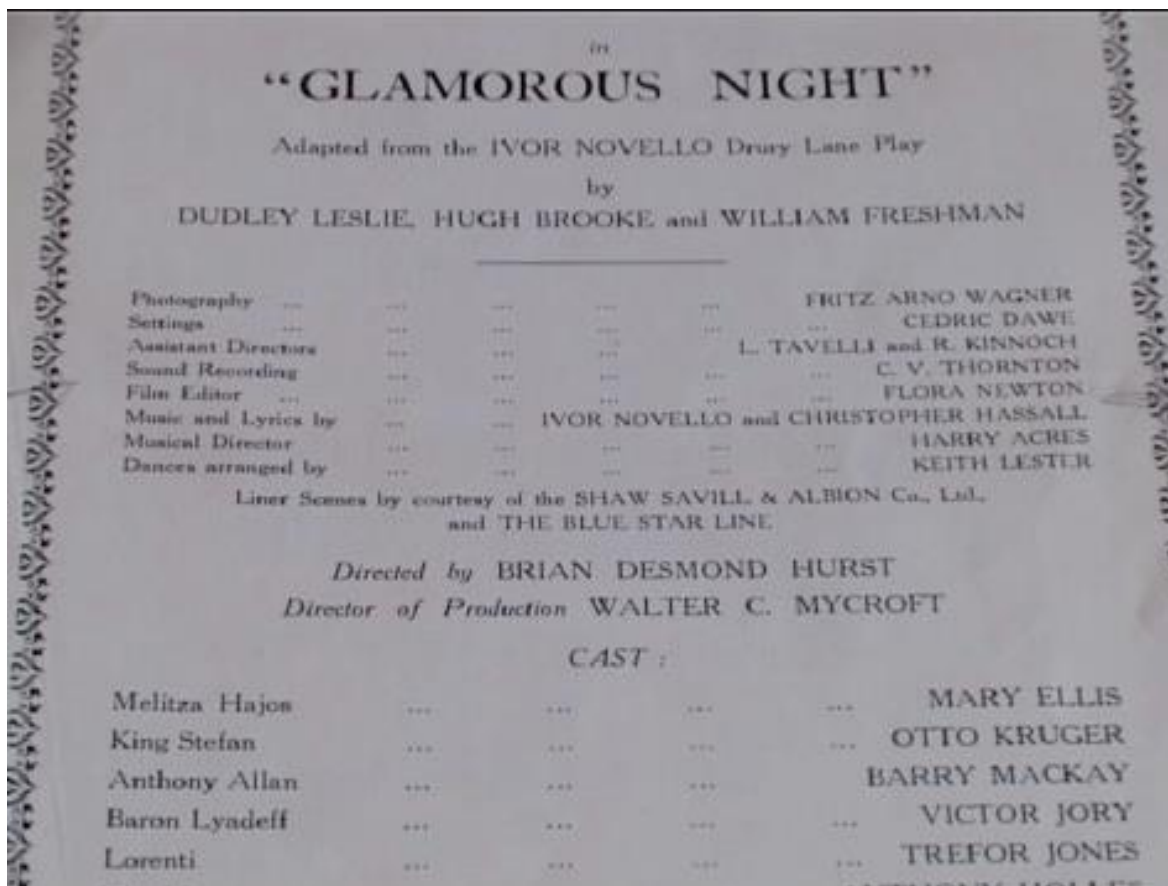
contributors and the artist addressed, subtitles would be offensive and might even, arguably, be racist. Certainly there was a question of voicing over, in bell hooks' terms.

I will describe what we gather from the film.<sup>14</sup> The conditions of Lydia Carmichael's birth meant that she grew up with the social construction of her self as 'Illegitimate' – that is, outside a patriarchal family and outside the legal status of one, and thus outside any prospect of sharing an egalitarian 'common'; and without knowing her mother or even the identity of her father. Gayle Chong Kwan extends Lydia Carmichael's role as witness and guide to create spliced narratives throughout the film, weaving Lydia's descriptions of the institutional conditions of her childhood across the intact series of interviews with the other contributors. Three of the other contributors are identified in British law as legitimate refugees or unlegitimised asylum-seekers, while the fourth, who speaks first, one might assume is a descendant of legal migrants. Of the contributors to the film, therefore, she is perhaps unique in having never crossed into a significant experience of illegitimacy (although there is no suggestion that any of the contributors have, through their own agency, done anything illegal, they have been placed into illegitimacy). A further subject and narrative in the film is Flora Newton, the deceased film editor mother of Lydia Carmichael, elements of whose professional work were retrieved from the BFI archives and shared with Lydia by Gayle.<sup>15</sup> In the closest thing to physical intimacy with her mother since she was left at the Foundling Hospital when she was two months old, we see Lydia Carmichael at a Steenbeck monitor (used by film editors) watching *Glamorous Night* for the first time, a film made in 1937 and edited by Flora Newton.

---

<sup>14</sup> Chong Kwan, Gayle, with Lydia Carmichael, Sapphira Gordon, Nadia Kakari, Kadie Turay, and Blenata Ballabani (2007), *Conversations*, produced by Matilda Pye with Marijke Steedman, for Tate Britain (Interpretation and Education), in partnership with Coram, The Foundling Museum, and Westminster Sure Start, exhibited concurrently with *Hogarth* (7 February - 29 April 2007). Information available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/conversations/default.shtm/> (Downloaded on: 4 January 2012).

<sup>15</sup> I refer to Gayle Chong Kwan as Gayle when I describe her in relation to a person, and Chong Kwan when I describe the film that she produced, and repeat this formula with all those I name.



Gayle Chong Kwan: Still from *Conversations* (2007)

In *Conversations*, Lydia Carmichael relates the rigid hierarchies and obsessional classifications and order that characterised her upbringing: '...The boys sat this side, the girls sat that side... the boys wore this, the girls wore that, and so on.' As witness and survivor, she speaks at last for the mass of children we see, homogenised in rows and rows of subservient uniformed figures: '...You did not open your mouth unless it was to say a payer or sing. You were not allowed to talk at all, otherwise you were in big trouble.' She points out her own childhood image: all we can see is an identical mass of girls, even to the fringe and bob haircuts. Chong Kwan's camera combines a seductive aesthetic with the narrative of repression, dwelling on these photographs, the Hogarths hanging on the walls, the architecture with its highly polished wood, the intense stone, the locks and chains.

We note with relief that the Foundling Hospital closed down in 1955. Sapphira Gordon is the first contributor to speak who is framed as a client of Coram. Eighteen, she is impressive and composed as she looks after her young son and describes motherhood that arrived, for her, when legally she was still

a child. Again, there is relief: it seems that we no longer force mothers to give up their children. She reads from an historic letter on display in the Museum, '... that your Petitioner, having a male negro which he is utterly unable to support and maintain, humbly prays that he may be admitted into the Hospital.' She says of Coram, 'It's a place of socialising with people, you know, who have the same situation, or the same predicament.' She talks of learning from each other, of education as 'a stepping stone'. She is evidence that the charity now respects the people who use it, no longer inducting the girls into lives of domestic servitude in other people's family homes, no longer making canon fodder of the boys. Society, it seems, has been transformed.

However, the reassurance gradually leaks away as others speak, especially Kadie Turay, an asylum seeker from Sierra Leone who vividly describes being alone at seventeen with a baby, her parents vanished in the civil war. She describes not knowing if they are dead or alive. We cannot hear exactly what she is saying, but we feel exactly what she means. '... I can't even say where they've taken me ...they shout at me like a criminal person ...' She is describing arriving in the UK and a terrible series of events that led to depression, enforced separation from her child as she is 'emergency sectioned' in psychiatric hospital, followed by imprisonment in an immigration detention centre. It is raining outside, her face is in shadow, her voice blurred with emotion; it is as if she is talking inwards, her pain is so deep. '... I just thought, did I do anything bad?'

Laced through the narratives, images of architectural beauty speak of the aestheticized lens through which the philanthropic privileged who patronized the Foundling Hospital gazed on their orderly subjects. The camera lingers on a heritage spiral staircase, with its turned mahogany banister; the padlock and a glimpse of light through oak doors; an interior curved wall picking up lavender shadows. This compelling aesthetic renders even more poignant the awful former orphanage.



Gayle Chong Kwan: Still from *Conversations* (2007)

We learned a great deal from *Conversations*. Its potential to transform, in Mörsch's terms, was limited in part because of the pressure I had put on the team to produce a 'manifestation' to show with the *Hogarth* exhibition. The needs of the contributors were very different from the short-duration, quick-turnover needs inherent in exhibition programming. We learned to try to navigate the timings and spaces of the museum in a variety of ways.

I am still uncertain whether the people who made up Tate Britain's 'public' – staff, visitors or artists – were able to hear the multiple voices that *Conversations* enunciated, whether in juxtaposition with *Hogarth* or not. What was heard may be buried in the unconscious for unquantifiable periods of time, out of reach of conventional visitor studies surveys which are commonly misunderstood to be the voice of museum education.



My experience is a case in point. Originally aware only that I was disturbed by the film, in the six years since its production, I have gradually realised that it exposes the analagous position of dispossessed or working class migrants now, with 'orphans' and their mothers from the historic and recent past. By categorising mothers as asylum-seekers or illegal immigrants or suicidal, the definition of mother is subsumed into the politics of a different status. An Other rather than a Mother, outside the protection of the law but subject to its procedures. I was already aware of the comparable experiences of loss, exploitation and enforced mobility that migrants share with vulnerable children and their families. *Conversations* clarified the comparable legal insecurities and structural exclusions. People categorised as migrants (formerly, those categorised as falling foul of patriarchy) lose their complex identities for the purpose of their exclusion from the common.

## Visual Dialogues

*Visual Dialogues* was an ambitious partnership project that was both national and, occasionally, international. Young people worked with different art museums to develop interpretation of particular works or displays to be installed in the galleries for use by other visitors. The programme ran for six years from 2004 until 2010 and involved many different education and exhibition curators, as well as student contributors, the majority of whom were at secondary school or college. Most were aged between fifteen and nineteen. Partners included collection-based galleries in English cities.<sup>16</sup> Each of the three consecutive curators working with me built on previous experience to introduce their own emphasis; the same was true for the curators and contributors in the regional museums.

At first, Veronica Sekules took on a mentoring role with colleagues and developed ideas of dialogue, group negotiation and self-determination by the contributors. She built on previous experience with a project developed in association with the National Touring Exhibitions (Hayward Gallery) exhibition, *Incommunicado*, curated by Clare Carolin from the Hayward (and developed in

---

<sup>16</sup> The Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle; Manchester City Galleries; Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, and Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, as well as Tate Britain in London.



consultation with the host galleries). I had worked with Clare at the Hayward, and had conceived a project that anticipated *Visual Dialogues*, which would develop collaborative interpretation for the tour of *Incommunicado*. Veronica Sekules developed, piloted and produced this project from the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, with interpretation devised by young people working with Hedsor, exhibited at SCVA alongside the exhibition (30th Sep 2003 - 14th Dec 2003). My original idea was for local groups to make interpretation at each site of the touring exhibition (playing on the theme of communication), with cross-communication producing multiply complex interpretation as the exhibition toured. I have since learned to distinguish between the model of an autonomous work conceived by an artist and played out by students (my original idea), and open projects in which the artist/educator is facilitator of unpredictable collaborations (closer to what happened); in essence, this was one of several experiences that contributed to an understanding of the distinction between participation and collaboration.

Following Veronica Sekules, Rebecca Heald aimed to mix people up and prevent groups becoming cultural silos; she worked with artists who had experience of exhibiting in comparable museums and galleries, and developed opportunities for contributors to present their work to one another. Finally, Indie Choudhury extended these practices to build on contributors' national and international connections, and to help the contributors and professionals to meet together, share workshops and ideas, and establish a wider network. Gradually, contributors to the programme were able to make deeper connections nationally and internationally, linking with other programmes at Tate.

The works that students chose together to interpret were extremely various and so were their interpretative productions. As well as sophisticated sound art and videos, an early favourite was young people working with Sarah Carne and Tina Corri which involved the transformation of Tate Britain's public toilets to offer users the chance to write on the tiled walls in response to the cottaging theme they uncovered in David Hockney's *Third Love Painting* (1960). Some excellent examples were incorporated in the design of the displays and frequently introduced museum professionals as well as visitors to new perspectives on works in the collections. The concept of interpretation was often conflated with making a work of art, and a few made new art historical contributions. For instance, one

project at Birmingham City Art Gallery involved artists Juneau Projects and a sixth form group, several of whom were British Muslims. They created audio guides for an installation of Orientalist painting in which they discussed William James Muller's painting *Prayers in the Desert* (1840 - 1849). Their audio commentaries revealed a number of inaccuracies in terms of Islamic prayer conventions, which suggested new ways of looking at a painting that an uninformed viewer might otherwise read as realist and assume to be based on fact.



Sarah Carne and the Visual Dialogues team of teenage school students at Tate Britain, 2005–6, curated by Tina Corri. Their work was in response to David Hockney's *Third Love Painting* (1960) hanging beside the installation in the picture on the left. Visitors were invited to dial numbers on 1960s phone to hear recordings relating to Hockney's painting. They were also invited to go downstairs to the Ladies lavatories where one cubicle was available to visitors to write 'Messages of Love'. Some of these were transcribed to be screened on the computer in the gallery, (masquerading as a 1960s television). Hockney's painting, made when homosexuality was illegal, relates to the messages on the walls he found on the lavatory walls at Earls Court Underground Station, and ideas of love. The students (who came from mixed religious and cultural backgrounds) initially chose to work with the painting because it is dull greys and pinks and easy to miss in a gallery full of primary-coloured 1960s works. When they understood the references they decided to continue to work with it. (Photo: Sarah Carne)

Over the course of *Visual Dialogues*, we observed a number of developments. The programme acquired greater sophistication in working with technology, starting with rather cumbersome interactive

machines and ending, for instance, with MP3 sound art developed with Soweto Kinch. The object gradually dematerialised and perhaps some of the most successful visible productions tended towards knowing mimicry of the information panels and leaflets, and interpretative ephemera commonly found in museums and other public spaces.

*Visual Dialogues* was initially funded short-term, with a demand from its funders, the DCMS, for a return of large 'people' numbers (although there was room for some leeway about who was a contributor and who a visitor). After a year of this and equivalent experiences I developed a practice that, in hindsight, I consider to be a classic artistic strategy: work on something until it tells you it is complete. This ensures that, whatever the funder's terms, one can conceive of a project as something that will endure beyond the short-term and that may take several iterations. Considering such an initiative as an artistic project that may need a series of different funding arrangements gives it depth as well as duration; in this sense it could be thought of as determining its own logic, rather than responding to the durational logics of either an exhibitionary model, or a funding model.

## **Endurance and Expansion**

The *Conversations* project was produced from longer running programmes at Tate Britain, the pre-school SureStart programme and the youth programmes which included Tate Forum. Tate Forum was unique within the continuing Tate peer-led youth groups, in that it originally recruited young people from inner London state schools in disadvantaged areas and initially most recruits had been identified by their teachers as progressing below their ability. Some young people within that group stayed with Tate Forum over years, from GCSE right through to degree. It became important for those involved in other shorter-term programmes such as *Visual Dialogues* to consolidate their association with Tate; one or two already involved were



Juneau Projects with Visual Dialogues team of teenage schoolstudents at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2007-08. Responding to William James Muller's Orientalist painting *Prayers in the Desert* (1840 - 1849) the students who were mostly from Muslim backgrounds developed this installation with audio points with their own perspectives on several paintings. This included critiques of British Orientalism as a form of realism.

able to join in with programmes like *Visual Dialogues*, *Nahnou-Together*, and *Youth Art Interchange*. In so doing, they were able to help others gain knowledge and cross between the different types of engagement offered by Tate and other organisations.<sup>17</sup>

I observed that Tate Forum was providing a public service for some young people that was equivalent to social care services that Caroline Benn might have recognised. For young people from migrant and non-migrant backgrounds whose families were outside of mainstream channels of 'cultural

---

<sup>17</sup> *Tate Forum* was a durational and evolving peer-led youth group. *Nahnou-Together* and *Youth Art Interchange* were international partnerships for curators, artists, educators and young people which, again, were durational and evolving. Both the latter were partnerships with the British Council. For more on Tate Forum, see, Sinker, Rebecca, 'On the Evolution of a Peer-led Programme', *Engage* 22, July 2008; for more on *Nahnou-Together* see my 'Border Crossing' (op. cit., see Note 9). *Youth Art Interchange*, led for Tate by Tate Liverpool, partnered with Tate Britain in London, Kiasma in Helsinki and Centre Pompidou in Paris and, initially, Reina Sofia in Madrid. It is the subject of a forthcoming Tate publication by Mark Miller.

capital', it offered a support system while they navigated their way through educational institutions whose structural, pedagogical and student cultures were all potentially alienating.

This support work could have longer term consequences that might be transformative of the museum: there was every possibility that some of the contributors to these youth programmes would become professionals working with art and its institutions. Programmes often worked with open-ended pedagogical and artistic strategies that emphasised negotiation and process (and that countered the managerialism imposed by government on state school teachers). I was sometimes concerned that the academic discussion of artworks was relatively superficial and we may have failed to equip students with a basis for research through which they could enjoy greater self-determination.

However, last year when giving a lecture to London MA students, I was pleased to recognise a young woman, a former child refugee, who had been part of the *Nabnon-Together* group which travelled to Syria. Recently I ran a seminar for professionals at the Whitechapel Gallery which included a young woman who was once part of Tate Forum. I don't see these individuals as citizens transformed. I see them as potential transformers, bringing their understanding of migration into institutions. There is, perhaps, a research project in the making to complement the Tate Encounters research, which made a point of recruiting co-investigators from migrant backgrounds who had *not* participated in Tate's education programmes.

### **Mobility, transformation and the network**

While it is often assumed that transformation is what happens to the lives of contributors to programmes like those described here, the potential for the transformation of institutions is of equal interest. The programme was gradually integrated into the different institutions, which enabled better collaboration between educators, exhibition curators and contributors. One of the changes was to make young people central, starting from the initial conception of exhibitions and displays. This counts as a significant achievement for gallery education; starting from the conference in 1988 that led to the

creation of Engage, a primary aim has been to put visitors at the centre of exhibitions and programming.<sup>18</sup>

At its most reductive, education serves either transformation or regulation. I would suggest it does both, for the institutions and for the people working within them, whether as students or educators. Even if we were to achieve a utopian common education system, we all have different temperaments and life experiences which affect how and what we learn. Institutions would be better off if the recruitment process valued diversity of experience and educational qualifications: when employed by Tate I felt that, having been educated at eight different state schools gave me complementary insights to my many colleagues for whom the Courtauld was the more usual route into a museum job. My recruitment practices were informed by my own wide as well as deep experience in formal education, and work in the department was the more effective and pleasurable for this. For gallery education, unless it merely wishes to mete out the 'affirmative', diversity of experience and the reflexivity that gives it value is essential. This is nothing to do with tokenism and the very opposite of dumbing down; knowledge is deepened by different perspectives and experience. Building on Carmen Mörsch's analysis, I suggest that we consider the idea of the network (as opposed to the identity of the individual citizen, for instance) in relation to transformation, employing reciprocity and elasticity to create a common space, weaving between and through institutions.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> A conference was convened in 1988 by the Arts Council of Great Britain and hosted by Southampton Museum and Art Gallery. It generated the intention to establish what became the National Association for Gallery Education, later known as Engage. After it seemed to be unsustainable as an organisation run by volunteers, a post was created in 1991 to lead it; I was the first person in that post. NAGE's early national conferences reveal the ideas of Engage members in common with radical historians, artists and curators which critique dominant modes of museum and gallery collection, acquisition and exhibition. Thinking differently about audiences, not as 'visitors as consumers', indicated thinking differently about what art and society could be. These ideas still echo, including - varyingly - in *Post-critical Museology*: one demand is for art museums to 'relocate the development of audiences at the centre of its practices' (indicating a complete shift away from targetting mass audiences), as well as to reverse 'the terms of the selective and privileged routes of cultural value and authority which continues to rest solely upon the networks of private investment and acquisition around the art object, the artist, collectors, patrons and donors.' Dewdney et al (2012) op.cit., p.8.

<sup>19</sup> *Post-critical Museology* (op.cit.) is theoretically informed by the work of social scientist Bruno Latour on Actor-Network-Theory and Nigel Thrift for his geo-cultural work relating to Latour. See also Bruno

Along with many others working in gallery education, former Tate colleagues of course have done just that. Frances Williams, now at the South London Gallery, has continued to confront issues of migration and globalisation, in partnership with other institutions, to enable students across London to develop familiarity with and understanding of London's art infrastructure. She links these programmes across the SLG and internationally, and the epithet she gives it, Diagonal Programming, alludes to the thinking behind it - lateral, associative, pointed, dynamic, possibly even carnivalesque. SLG's recent expansion has made integrated programming easier across exhibitions and education curatorship; the accommodation available for international artist's residencies supports this. Frances' former colleague, Ashley Whitfield, ran, on behalf of SLG, the international partnership programme *Nine Urban Biotopes: Negotiating the Future of Urban Living* with German, Italian, French and South African partners. Each of them had, as they put it, 'participatory approaches in engaging with active citizens and initiators of innovative urban development projects.' The partnership involved opening up discussions around the urban in global cities, while also interrogating the meanings of the local and the diaspora across countries and continents.

Building on the film programme, *Contemporary Africa On Screen*, and the inter-generational education project, *Looking for Sierra Leone*, the programme *South by South* will bring Nigerian-based artist Emeka Ogboh to SLG to contribute to the development of two programmes, including screenings of films by African diaspora artists and a film project with young people from Camberwell and Peckham, and to create an exhibition for the gallery. It is anticipated that his work will involve drawing on the knowledge and participation of the people living and working locally to SLG, an area with strong cultural links to Nigeria and West Africa. Once again, the Gallery will be drawing together elements of the relevant local and international art infrastructure, to develop networks with other organisations in London and Paris.

Emeka Ogboh's residency, however, has been postponed for visa reasons. We urgently need to learn about border controls and exclusions; these things are done in our name and we are potential victims. We urgently need to learn how to travel as opposed to holiday, to really cross cultures and develop tangible, personal international networks. The Internet and Facebook are not enough.

I propose that an important aim of gallery education programmes addressing citizenship in a global world would be to enable contributors to physically cross international art borders. This would offer invaluable practical experience and embodied learning for both professionals and contributors, while posing real challenges for the institutions as well as individual citizens. It raises important questions concerning the development of a global élite and border control, questions of the diaspora and the indigenous, and migration in relation to the globalised art world.

Why is practical experience and embodied learning so significant? As gallery educators it is likely we already assume it is; there is a strong link between gallery education and multi-modal and cross disciplinary forms of education, including art practice; there is attention to concepts of composite meaning-making; there is an understanding of the impact of emotional and sensual experience in the process of learning. And yet, when it comes to crossing cultures and national borders, we are often satisfied with virtual contact, at least for 'participants'. For this article, as well as for other areas of my work in the last decade, I have drawn on – and learned from – a particular experience of border crossing which took me into an unanticipated landscape. In January 2002, travelling for work from London to Los Angeles, I was detained in San Pedro Detention Center outside Los Angeles because my passport was out of date and no-one at Heathrow (including me) had noticed. Being trapped in a nightmare which included an orange jumpsuit was a revelation. (It is relevant here to mention that I am white and my spoken English approximates BBC norms.) Since then, increasing numbers have shared with me their own nightmare experiences. The *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Feb 2009, reports, '... In recent years, the government has increasingly contracted out its immigration detention services nationwide to private companies such as the Corrections Corp. of America and the GEO Group. The move toward privatisation has been criticized by immigrant rights advocates, who say that detention has become a



lucrative business ... Eighty-three detainees have died while in immigration custody since 2004 ... 'The government routinely detains people who are neither a danger nor a flight risk, [said Ahilan Arulanantham, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California] ...'<sup>20</sup>

In the twenty-seven hours that I was detained I estimated that five or possibly six different security contractors handled my incarceration and realised that this added up to the lucrative business the LA Times describes. Notions of consumers or citizens were an irrelevance: inefficient but relatively docile women were an effective boost for the organisations to hit their contracted business targets.

Among many other things, this event taught me about power and institutions, and about embodied experience. It also taught me about the ways those of us whose mobility is at least close to that of the global elite have minimal comprehension about what it is to be remote from it. Recently a law-abiding Moroccan friend my family had invited for Christmas was refused entry by the British government but, six months later, his work was allowed in to be exhibited in London. The UK government disallows individual friendships with people who come from the wrong countries. As Roshi Naidoo noted, 'we' are prepared to take people's ideas while excluding them. Issues concerning a global elite are also about our national experiences of government; they directly affect culture. It is only by testing national borders that one can feel what they are made of.

Close readings of exhibitions can reveal broad as well as deep art histories. Curator Paul Goodwin describes a situation in which diasporic Caribbean artists are shown internationally less often than those resident in the Caribbean. This is the very opposite of what I have observed for diasporic Middle Eastern artists. While none of us knows of research to back it up, we can make deductions based on the different politics and cultures attaching to each region.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/03/local/me-ladetai3> (Downloaded on: 11 December 2011)

<sup>21</sup> Goodwin, Paul, in recorded discussion with the author, 6 March 2013, 'What does globalisation mean for art institutions?', No 1, *Education: Politics and Practices* seminar series, Whitechapel Gallery [http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category\\_id/22/product\\_id/1533](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category_id/22/product_id/1533) online publication forthcoming. Also see Goodwin, P. (2012), 'Whose Global? Towards a Critical Cross Cultural Perspective in the Global Museum', ter Horst, M. (2012), *Changing Perspectives: Dealing with Globalisation in the Presentation and Collection of Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: KIT Publishers.

On the tube I bump into Lorenzo, another student who travelled to Syria and Jordan with *Nabnou-Together*. He says the experience was life-changing; it opened his eyes to different realities, he tells me: it was in Jordan he saw an I-Phone for the first time and as a sixth-former, he was interested in the technology. But with hindsight, he says, it has enabled him to think differently about class, privilege, nationality and a part of the world previously unknown to him.

### Concluding thoughts

To enjoy anything like mobility in all its many guises, students who are framed in their own country as 'regional' or lacking cultural capital need to imagine themselves in, and to become part of, a common global art network. Without it, talk of 'aspiration' and 'citizenship' is disingenuous nonsense. Given the prevailing European politics, empathy for the complex identities of people portrayed as migrants could hardly be more urgent. Gallery education needs a cross cultural approach with a reflexive awareness of the agency of institutions and their employees, underpinned with ideas of the common and of transformation. Concepts of philanthropy, or corporate social responsibility, work against this.

At Tate, we discovered the range of interpretation of words such as 'public' and 'common'. Some people suggested that aspects of the department's work with young people (including, for instance, those identified by government as disadvantaged, as well as young people looked after by Social Services) was, in their own terms, evangelising or instrumentalising or, in Mörsch's terms, 'reproductive'. This view was expressed as a libertarian (left or right) critique of New Labour which was then in government. I had a different take. I see art museums as comparable to the Ramblers' Association: clusters of people – citizens, possibly – repeatedly walking to claim and reclaim land threatened with slipping from the common into the private. This is not a political end in itself; it is simply where we are – the 'paradoxical present', as former colleagues have described it.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Dewdney, A., D. Dibosa, & V. Walsh, p.8 (op. cit.).

Despite its current lack of presence in public discourse, the idea of the common remains an important one with me: that we defend common institutions, keep places common, and care for people collectively. Some argue that the very notion of public ownership has only ever been a screen to mask the controlling forces of capitalist power, and current government policies could not make this argument more persuasive.

My attitudes towards statutory social structures derive in part from a feminist critique of the family, radical approaches to social work and collectivity that informed my youth, and a strong attachment to the idea that children and young people are the responsibility of society and its many citizens and institutions. The people working in these institutions, whether museums, schools, health or transport, should consider this part of their public responsibility, regardless of its superficial similarity to short-term New Labour instrumentalist policies. The opportunities that Tate gave me to work and share ideas, for instance, with people in Jordan and Syria, increased my appreciation of statutory social structures that resist corruption and are additional to the family. I also learned not to take them for granted. Whether they are on the move as refugees, detained and tortured, or lying low in their homes, Syrian people are daily discovering the tragedy of being demarcated out of citizenship by a despotic regime. We all need statutory social structures to stand up against corruption and intimidation, which free people – whether nominated as legitimate citizens or illegitimate migrants – to find stability as well as mobility in a common ground. The border-crossing radical roots of gallery education, still framed within the statutory sector, can nourish that common ground. Gallery education is one of the few, free, areas of unregulated and unassessed education open to people in Britain; this fact alone challenges us to use our own artistic imaginations, and those who contribute to our programmes, to keep on bashing at the barricades of the global cultural elite. Actual travel, actual knowledge, is essential.

published in *Engage* 32, summer 2013

© Felicity Allen

'Reassembling the Barricades' one of three articles arising from a guest scholarship at the Getty Research Institute during which I reflected on the cross cultural work undertaken by Tate Britain's Interpretation and Education (I&E) Department between 2003 and 2010, under my leadership. The other articles are

'What does globalisation mean for education in the art museum?' in Katavuori, K., ed. (2013), *It's all Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press;

'Creativity v Education' in Art Monthly no 366, May 2013, and an expanded version 'Invasive Assessments, Surprise, and Performing the Self in the Sketchbook' (in Dutch), *De Witte Raaf* 120, Nov-Dec 2012.

I am grateful to the Getty teams and colleague scholars, and especially Toby Tannenbaum, Alexa Sekyra, Daniela Ferrari and Xochitl Flores-Marcial.

In this article I refer to Dewdney, A., D. Dibosa, & V. Walsh, *Post-critical Museology: theory and practice in the art museum* (2012), London: Routledge, produced from the Tate Encounters research project, the idea of which originated from Tate Britain's Interpretation and Education department. It was developed in partnership with London South Bank University and led by Professor Andrew Dewdney. It contains important discussion and documentation of aspects of the work of the department during the period that I discuss here, as well as histories of gallery education at Tate.